Unit .34

Session .02

Continuing through Opposition

Scripture

Acts 22:30; 23:6-17, 22-24

30 The next day, since he wanted to find out exactly why Paul was being accused by the Jews, he released him and instructed the chief priests and all the Sanhedrin to convene. He brought Paul down and placed him before them ... **6** When Paul realized that one part of them were Sadducees and the other part were Pharisees, he cried out in the Sanhedrin, "Brothers, I am a Pharisee, a son of Pharisees. I am being judged because of the hope of the resurrection of the dead!" **7** When he said this, a dispute broke out between the Pharisees and the Sadducees, and the assembly was divided. **8** For the Sadducees say there is no resurrection, and neither angel nor spirit, but the Pharisees affirm them all. **9** The shouting grew loud, and some of the scribes of the Pharisees' party got up and argued vehemently, "We find nothing evil in this man. What if a spirit or an angel has spoken to him?" **10** When the dispute became violent, the commander feared that Paul might be torn apart by them and ordered the troops to go down, take him away from them, and bring him into the barracks. **11** The following night, the Lord stood by him and said, "Have courage! For as you have testified about me in Jerusalem, so it is necessary for you to testify in Rome." **12** When it was morning, the Jews formed a conspiracy and bound themselves under a curse not to eat or drink until they had killed Paul. **13** There were more than forty who had formed this plot. **14** These men went to the chief priests and elders and said, "We have bound ourselves under a solemn curse that we won't eat anything until we have killed Paul. **15** So now you, along with the Sanhedrin, make a request to the commander that he bring him down to you as if you were going to investigate his case more thoroughly. But, before he gets near, we are ready to kill him." **16** But the son of Paul's sister, hearing about their ambush, came and entered the barracks and reported it to Paul. **17** Paul called one of the centurions and said, "Take this young man to the commander, because he has something to report to him." ... **22** So the commander dismissed the young man and instructed him, "Don't tell anyone that you have informed me about this." **23** He summoned two of his centurions and said, "Get two hundred soldiers ready with seventy cavalry and two hundred spearmen to go to Caesarea at nine tonight. **24** Also provide mounts to ride so that Paul may be brought safely to Felix the governor."

Intro Options

Main Point:
God strengthens His people through His presence.

Remember, this icon means there is a Leader Pack item that goes with the lesson. See Leader Pack for additional instructions.

Option 1

Ask your students to share what Popeye's source of strength is: spinach! If they don't know who he is, show them a picture of Popeye and explain his story.

Have your kids break into small groups. Each group should come up with a new cartoon character and decide what his or her "spinach" would be: what would make him or her suddenly stronger? Their character might get strength from hearing a particular song, or from a certain color, etc. See who has the most creative or funniest idea.

Next, students should come up with a list of three to five real-life "spinach" items from which people get their strength. It could be likes on social media, sports statistics, grades, or any other way we get "strength." You may want to talk about the limitations of these sources of strength. In today's session, we'll see where Paul got his "spinach" to face opposition: God's presence! After all, what could possibly make us stronger than the very presence of God Almighty Himself?

Option 2

In your large group, come up with a list of goals worth striving for. They could come from anywhere or relate to anything: getting on the honor roll, winning an athletic championship, reading the Bible in a year, developing habits of generosity, etc.

Once you've got your list, ask your students how many of those goals are likely to encounter opposition at some level—chances are that all of them will. Discuss how almost anything worth striving for is likely to encounter opposition.

Ask them to compose another list; this time, the list should be spiritual goals worth striving for. Greater holiness, more patience, a more active prayer life, an ear that is quicker to listen and a mouth that is slower to speak, etc. Again, ask how many of these goals won't encounter some opposition. Chances are, all of them will encounter some opposition. Discuss what kind of opposition they'll encounter. How will we handle that opposition?

In today's session, we'll see Paul encounter opposition to the gospel, and we'll see how he shrewdly and lovingly handles that opposition. May the Holy Spirit use this lesson to help us handle opposition as well as Paul does, for the sake of the gospel and for the love of the lost.

TEACHING PLAN

Read Acts 22:30; 23:6-9.

Paul was arrested and beaten without due process, but when the Roman authorities became aware of Paul's citizenship, they sought more evidence before coming to a verdict. Since he had been accused by the Jews, the tribune gathered the Jewish leaders and Paul to determine precisely what Paul was being accused of.

- **What was Paul's strategy before the Sanhedrin?**

Paul used the opportunity to testify to Jesus' resurrection and wisely used the Pharisees and Sadducees opposing beliefs about resurrection to his advantage. Paul found common ground with the Pharisees. He was a Pharisee before his conversion, so he appealed both to his past and to their doctrinal agreement in order to gain their favor. His common ground with the Pharisees was a point of division with the Sadducees, which resulted in fighting among the Sanhedrin (a Jewish ruling body composed mostly of Sadducees and some Pharisees). By dividing the Sanhedrin and finding favor with the Pharisees, he no longer had to defend himself, because some members of the Sanhedrin advocated for Paul in his defense.

- **What can we learn from the fact that it seems Paul's words were the result of something he realized while standing before the Sanhedrin (v. 6)?**

God gave Paul the words he needed in his moment, and He can do that for us, too. While we should always be ready to give a defense of our faith, we can also live in full confidence that God will empower us in whatever situation we find ourselves in. God doesn't leave His servants alone; rather, He is with us through every situation, giving us the grace and wisdom we need for each moment.

99 Essential Doctrines (p. 16, DDG)

18. God is Truthful

The Scriptures are clear that in God there is no falsehood (Titus 1:2; Heb. 6:18). God represents things as they really are. Everything He says can be trusted because God guarantees the truth of everything He tells us. The call for humans to be honest and not to bear false witness is rooted in the utter truthfulness of our Creator. Telling the truth is one way we bear the image of God, whose Son is "the way, the truth, and the life" (John 14:6).

COMMENTARY

Main Point:
God strengthens His people through His presence.

Acts 22:30; 23:6-9

"This body largely consisted of the high priestly aristocracy and the ruling elders, who were primarily Sadducees. The Pharisees were in the minority and were represented among the scribes who sat in the Sanhedrin."[1]

"Paul is not merely trying to cause dissension among the group of Pharisees and Sadducees when he says I am on trial here because I hope that the dead will rise to life. As a Pharisee, Paul believed that the dead would be raised to life, and he saw this hope realized in the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead."[2]

"Paul's announcement threw the apple of discord into the ranks of the Sanhedrin. The Pharisees were immediately inclined to concede that a man who was so sound on a central Pharisaic doctrine could not be so bad at heart after all; the Sadducees were more enraged than ever, at this public invocation of what was in their eyes a lately invented heresy. For, as Luke explains to his readers (who would not be conversant with the theological differences between the two main Jewish parties), the Sadducees denied the doctrine of bodily resurrection, and rejected the belief in a spirit world of angels and demons, whereas the Pharisees accepted both as essential elements of their creed."[3]

Activity

Split students into groups; each group should write down a situation where a Christian might face opposition Collect the cards and redistribute them randomly. Each group should now have a card with an illustration of the kinds of opposition Christians might face today. They should prepare a short skit with two scenes: in the first scene, the Christians respond to the opposition wrongly, by looking to themselves or something other than God for strength. In the second scene, the Christians should respond to the opposition by looking to God's presence for strength. If possible, they should rely on specific promises from the Scripture.

1. Polhill, Acts
2. Barclay Moon Newman and Eugene A. Nida, A Handbook on the Acts of the Apostles (New York: United Bible Societies, 1993).
3. F. F. Bruce (2013). New International Commentary, The. Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co.. Retrieved from https://app.wordsearchbible.lifeway.com
4. David Roach, Christ's Resurrection: Strongest Evidence Cited. Baptist Press, 29 Mar. 2018, www.baptistpress.com/resource-library/news/christs-resurrection-strongest-evidence-cited/.
5. William Lane Craig, The Resurrection of Jesus: Reasonable Faith. The Resurrection | Popular Writings | Reasonable Faith, www.reasonablefaith.org/writings/popular-writings/jesus-of-nazareth/the-resurrection-of-jesus/.

In Defense (p. 18, DDG)

The historical reality of Jesus' resurrection is the very foundation of the Christian faith. Paul claimed in 1 Corinthians 15 that apart from it, the entire Christian religion is stripped of its hope and power. But we have good reason to believe that it did, in fact, happen. Dr. Stephen Wellum says, "The evidence for the resurrection is well known, and it consists of three interlocking pieces: 1) the fact of the empty tomb, 2) the resurrection appearances of Christ, and 3) the transformation of the disciples and the establishment of the church."[4] None of these are conclusive individually, but collectively, they offer a powerful testimony to the history of the resurrection." Apologist William Lane Craig wrote, "The resurrection of Jesus constitutes a solid rock on which Christians can take their stand for God's decisive self-revelation in Jesus."[5]

TEACHING PLAN

Read Acts 23:10-11.

When you live for God's mission, there is bound to be opposition. From Abel to Joseph, from David to Jeremiah, and from Jesus to the apostles, this pattern is clear throughout the Scriptures. Peter even said that Christians should not be surprised by these trials (1 Pet. 4:12). As frightening as that may be, we have a steady anchor to cling to—the Savior who suffered for us stands with us as we suffer for Him.

- **When has God strengthened you in the midst of a difficult situation?**

Our hope is not in good circumstances or that God will keep us from hardships, but that God will be with us through them all. In our most desperate moments, He is there with grace and strength, comfort and peace. When we feel as though we have little control, we can rest in His providence.

- **What principle can we learn from Jesus' promise to Paul?**

Jesus promised Paul that he would be a witness for Him in Rome. While that was a very specific promise to Paul, there is a broad principle we can learn from this verse. When you are living on Christ's mission, His purposes for your life will prevail. Missionary John Paton wrote, "I realized that I was immortal till my Master's work with me was done."[6] No matter how fearful our circumstances may be, we can trust that God is in control of our future. As King David wrote, "all my days were written in your book and planned before a single one of them began (Ps. 139:16).

Read Acts 23:12-17, 22-24.

- **How did Jesus save Paul's life?**

Although Jesus promised that Paul would live to testify about Him in Rome, we should note that God used people to accomplish that promise. He used Paul's nephew, a Roman commander, and hundreds of soldiers. God's definite plan came to pass through the wisdom, courage, and will of a number of different people. God is going to accomplish His plan, but He is going to do it through you. Are you willing to respond to God's call for you?

- **What can we learn from the people whose actions protected Paul?**

This verese helps us recognize both our power and our limitations as humans. Paul's nephew could not stop the ambush, but he could warn Paul. Paul was very limited in what he could do from jail, but he could help his nephew get his report to an authority figure. The commander couldn't personally protect Paul, but he could use his authority to arrange for his protection. Each person did all they could do, and God used them collectively to accomplish His purpose.

COMMENTARY

Main Point:
God strengthens His people through His presence.

Acts 23:10-11

"The Lord had certainly prepared him well for the events that had just transpired in Jerusalem (20:23; 21:10f). Still they had been particularly trying—the mob in the temple square, the arrest, the attempted scourging, the violence in the Sanhedrin. To what was it all leading? The Lord's words assured him that there was a divine purpose in all that had happened to him. As he had borne his witness in Jerusalem, so he would bear it in Rome."[7]

Earlier, Paul stood before earthly authorities with his fate seemingly in the balance. But later, the One with all authority in heaven and on earth stood before Paul, reminding him of the fate that he was destined for.

Acts 23:12-17, 22-24

"Those who seek to take things into their own hands do not have as much control as they think. And in seeking to take matters into their own hands, they also overstep the divine law they think they are defending by agreeing to lie and murder. The irony is that they take an oath before God that actually violates God's standards and will."[8]

"As for the chief captain, as he was appointed to be the minister of God's providence to save Paul's life, so he delivereth him now the second time by his soldiers from death."[9]

"It is one of the mysteries of God and his providence that many times we cannot see why things are happening as they are. Yet God is surely at work in ways we could not have planned for ourselves."[10]

6. John Paton, Immortal Till His Work Was Done: John Paton (1824–1907),"Desiring God, January 28, 2019, https://www.desiringgod.org/articles/immortal-till-his-work-was-done.

7. Polhill, Acts

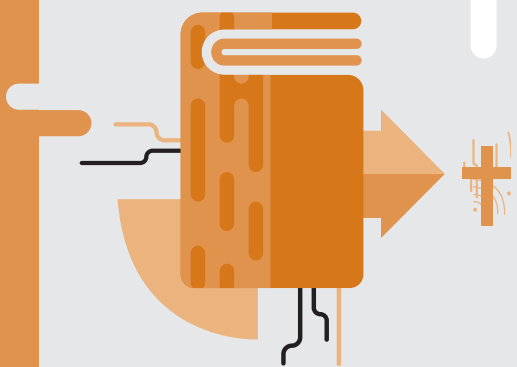
8. Bock, Acts

9. John Calvin and H Beveridge, The Retention of Minority Languages in the United States: a Seminar on the Analytic Work of Calvin J. Veltman (Bellingham, WA: Logos Bible Software, 2010).

10. Bock, Acts

(p. 17, DDG) Christ Connection

Paul's confidence in the midst of trying circumstances came from his faith that the God of his fathers was the God who had revealed His glory in the person and work of Jesus Christ. Paul believed that the faithfulness of God that was shown through the cross and resurrection of Jesus would sustain him through persecution and trial.



CONTINUING THROUGH OPPOSITION

Acts 20:30; 23:6-17, 22-24

CONTINUING THROUGH OPPOSITION

God strengthens His people through His presence.

JESUS CONNECTION

Paul remained confident by remembering God's faithfulness to His people. God revealed Himself through Jesus' death and resurrection. Jesus' example shows that God will sustain His disciples through persecution and trials.

LIFEWISE QUALITY

COURAGE – Boldly doing the right thing, even in difficult circumstances.

HEAD

What dangers did Paul face in sharing the gospel?

How did God use the soldiers to protect Paul in the midst of great opposition?

HEART

The Bible says that God is good and faithful. How does knowing who God is help you to live with courage even in difficult times?

Both Jesus and Paul continued to talk about God in spite of great opposition (e.g., others ignoring or arguing with them, threats, physical harm, arrest). What kinds of opposition do we face today? What makes it hard for us to show courage in those situations?

HANDS

Fear is one of the biggest hurdles to living with courage. People are afraid of many things. Some of them are small, like speaking in public, spiders or going to the dentist. But others are much bigger. In the lists below, draw a line to match each fear to the truth about God that addresses that fear. Choose one that you struggle with (or pick a different one). Pray about it, confessing to God that you're scared in this area. Ask Him to remind you of the truth and ask Him for the courage to do what's right in spite of your fear.

Rejection	God always keeps His promises.
Failure	Jesus said, "I am coming again."
The Future	God loves us with an everlasting love.
Change	Jesus will never leave us or forsake us.
Uncertainty/What if	Nothing can separate us from God's love.